Opportunity for Public Review and Comment on Proposed Forest Operations along Takla Lake

Complaint Investigation 990217

FPB/IRC/34

September 2000

103-06348/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Investigation **1**

Background 1

Investigation Findings **2**

Opportunity to Comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan 2

Notification 2

Adequacy of the Opportunity for Review and Comment 4

Opportunity to Review and Comment on Major Amendment #18 9

Efforts Towards Improved Communications 10

Conclusions **12**

Recommendations **12**

Investigation

On August 30, 1999, the Board received a complaint from the owner of a tourist lodge (Takla Rainbow Lodge) on Takla Lake in the Fort St. James Forest District. The complainant said that he had been denied an adequate opportunity to participate in operational planning for Forest Licence A40873, which is held by Canadian Forest Products Ltd. (the licensee) and located across the lake from the lodge.

The complainant said that one of his main objectives in making the complaint was to create a freer flow of information about operational plans so that he could provide informed comments in future. He emphasized that improved communications were essential in addressing his substantive concerns about forest practices in the licence area and the impacts of logging on fish habitat and scenic views.

The investigation focused on whether the opportunities provided to the complainant, to review and comment on operational plans, were sufficient to meet the requirements of the Forest Practices Code. In addition, given the complainant's long-term interest, as a lodge owner, in operational planning the investigation emphasized facilitating future communications between the complainant, the licensee and the Ministry of Forests district office.

Background

Takla Lake is a long, deep lake about two hours, by car, north of Fort St. James. Summer guests at the complainant's lodge are attracted by the spectacular wilderness setting and the chance to fish for large rainbow trout and Arctic char.

For many years the complainant has been critical of the licensee's practices, which he believes result in a negative impact on his business. He is primarily concerned about the visibility of clearcuts from the lodge and possible effects of forest practices on fish habitat. Over the years, he has observed a significant decline in the size and number of trout and char and, he believes, an eradication of sockeye populations. He attributes these conditions to several factors, including: sedimentation, increased temperatures of salmon spawning streams due to the removal of forest cover along streams, lower lake levels and increased lake temperatures. He believes that, over time, extensive clearcuts, especially large ones in beetle-infested areas, have led to a significant reduction in groundwater levels and, consequently, in lake levels. He also believes that extensive clearcuts have accelerated early release of runoff flow, resulting in increased lake temperatures during the summer and fall.[1]

The complainant believes that visible clearcuts, and the impact of the licensee's forest practices on fish habitat in Takla Lake, have a negative economic effect on his business, which relies on scenic values and fisheries to attract clientele.

---

[1] The complainant's concerns about possible impacts of forestry operations on fish populations and habitat were not investigated because his complaint was only about participation in planning processes.

At the time of the complaint, the complainant's communications with the licensee and the Ministry of Forests district office had been tense for many years. The complainant felt that his concerns were regularly ignored or not addressed adequately. The licensee and Ministry of Forests district staff expressed concern about the accusatory tone of the complainant's correspondence.

Investigation Findings

Opportunity to Comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan

Note: A series of amendments to the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* (the Act) and the *Operational Planning Regulation* came into effect on June 15, 1998. On August 26, 1998, Canadian Forest Products Ltd. submitted a forest development plan to the Ministry of Forests district manager for approval. Section 10(1)(d) of the Act provides that a forest development plan must meet the requirements of the Act and regulations that are in effect four months before the date on which the plan is submitted for approval. Thus, the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan had to meet the requirements of the Act and regulations that were in effect before the June 15 amendments.

This section of the report will consider whether the complainant received adequate notification of the opportunity for review and comment and if the opportunity itself was adequate.

Notification

Public review and comment is an important component of the operational planning process, and prompt and effective notification to the public about the opportunity to comment on forest development plans is essential. Section 2(1)[2] of the *Operational Planning Regulation* requires that a person who is submitting a forest development plan must first publish a notice in a newspaper, in a form acceptable to the district manager, stating that the forest development plan is available for public review and comment.

On May 30 and June 6, 1998, the licensee placed a notice in the *Prince George Citizen* indicating that the draft 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan for Forest Licence A40873 would be available for public review at the company's Fort St. James office until August 4, 1998. A similar notice appeared in the *Caledonia Courier*, the Fort St. James weekly newspaper, on June 3 and June 10.

Although there are no additional legislated requirements for notification, the *Forest Development Plan Guidebook* suggests notification by radio in remote areas, in addition to newspaper advertisements. In some areas of the province, members of the public may have limited or no access to newspapers. The complainant has no direct access to any local news media. The closest television station he can watch by satellite is in Vancouver, and no local radio signals reach his residence. His primary access to the outside world is by the internet, telephone, fax and email. Information about the opportunity for public review and comment on forest development plans

[2] Now section 25.

is not currently available on the Ministry of Forests or Canadian Forest Products websites or on the website of the *Prince George Citizen.*

The complainant estimates that, on average, he makes the two-hour drive to Fort St. James about once every two weeks. He learned about the opportunity to review and comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan during one of these trips when he picked up a newspaper. Although he was thus made aware of the plan, he maintains that the licensee should notify him directly of opportunities to review and comment on forest development plans when they arise.

The *Forest Development Plan Guidebook* also recommends that forest district staff make direct contact with individuals known to have an immediate interest in local land and resource management issues. The complainant operates virtually the only tourist operation on Takla Lake and has, for several years, engaged the licensee in vigorous correspondence about its operational plans.

Although the complainant eventually learned about the opportunity for review and comment, he was not made aware of that opportunity at the beginning of the 60-day review and comment period. Given the remoteness of the complainant's location and his obvious business interest in operational planning in the vicinity of Takla Lake, the analyst considers that the licensee should have notified him directly about the opportunity for review and comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan. This proactive notification does not grant special treatment to the complainant, it merely acknowledges his direct economic interest and the absence of access to channels of communication available to most other members of the public.

Finding #1

The licensee complied with Code requirements for public notification of the opportunity to review and comment on its 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan. However, the licensee should have notified the complainant directly about the opportunity to review and comment on the plan.

In the fall of 1999, a new district manager was appointed to the Fort St. James Forest District. On February 9, 2000, after initiating a meeting with the complainant and the licensee, she asked the licensee to voluntarily send copies of all future forest development plans to the complainant and to ensure those copies are received by the complainant at the start of the review and comment period. The licensee agreed to do so. This action should resolve the complainant's concerns about notification.

Adequacy of the Opportunity for Review and Comment

Section 4(1)[3] of the *Operational Planning Regulation* requires that a person who publishes a notice must provide adequate opportunity for review and comment to persons interested in or affected by operations under a plan or amendment. Section 4(4)[4] of the *Operational Planning Regulation* provides that the opportunity for review and comment will only be adequate if the district manager is satisfied that the opportunity is commensurate with the nature and extent of a person's interest and any right that person may have to use the area under the plan.

Considerations in determining the adequacy of the opportunity to review and comment on a forest development plan include the following:

- Did the licensee provide opportunities for members of the public to view the plan and discuss their concerns?
- Was the plan easy to understand?
- What steps did the licensee take to respond to public concerns?

Opportunity for Plan Review

The newspaper notice placed by the licensee stated that the forest development plan would be available for viewing at its Fort St. James office for the duration of the review and comment period and that a representative would be available to discuss the proposed plan. The complainant stated that he did not take advantage of this opportunity because he believed he would not receive respectful treatment and adequate attention to his questions and concerns at the licensee's office. Instead, he felt that the licensee should bring the plan to the lodge, so his concerns could be discussed in a location where the impact of proposed cutblocks could be discussed in context.

Towards the end of the review and comment period, the complainant's wife[5] wrote to the licensee, proposing a meeting at the lodge to discuss the forest development plan. The licensee replied that the plan was available for viewing at Fort St. James and offered to set up a meeting there to discuss issues relating to visual quality. The complainant wrote back (after the plan had been submitted for approval) to reject the offer and insist that the meeting be held at the lodge for a "site-specific observation." There appears to have been no reply by the licensee to this letter, which accused the licensee of "wanton destruction."

Venues for discussion of forest development plans had long been a contentious subject between the complainant and the licensee and, in fact, had been a subject of an unsuccessful mediation attempt initiated by the previous district manager. Wherever feasible, it is useful for licensees to visit areas of concern to affected persons and discuss plans where their impact will be felt. This enhances both the opportunity for informed public comment and the opportunity for licensees

---

[3] Now section 27(1). The word "adequate" was deleted in the June 1998 amendment.

[4] Now section 27(8).

[5] The complainant and his wife work together as a team and alternate in signing correspondence with the licensee.

to understand and address public concerns in the geographical context of the plan area. This opportunity is particularly important in the case of a business interest that may experience a direct economic impact. At the same time, a licensee's time constraints – and the volume of material included in a plan – must be taken into account.

While it might have been advisable for the licensee to conduct a presentation at the complainant's lodge, where his concerns about impacts on visual and fisheries resources could be discussed in context, the licensee followed standard and acceptable practice in making the plan available in Fort St. James. Although it was unfortunate that a poor relationship between the complainant and the licensee discouraged the complainant from viewing the plan at the licensee's office, this in itself did not provide cause to conclude that the licensee acted unreasonably in not presenting the plan to the complainant at his lodge.

Finding #2

The licensee provided an adequate opportunity for public viewing of the forest development plan at its office in Fort St. James.

The licensee has recently indicated a commitment to present subsequent forest development plans to the complainant at his lodge, thus resolving this aspect of his complaint.

Clarity of the Plan

During the review and comment period, the district manager asked the licensee if it had sent a copy of the plan to the complainant. In response, six days before the end of the review and comment period, the licensee wrote to the complainant on July 29, 1998: "Please find attached a copy of our Forest Development Plan 1998-2003. We have also enclosed the maps, which are 1:50,000." The enclosure consisted of a colour copy of the overview map of the MacDougall-Sakeniche operating areas. The forest cover overlay and the text portion of the plan were not included.

On August 3, the complainant's wife notified the company that there was no plan attached to the map and asked for all relevant information pertaining to logging close to the Takla Lake shoreline. She asked the licensee to send resource maps for the Sakeniche operating area as well as stream classification maps. The company responded: "We do not make complete plans available to anyone other than government agencies. The complete plan is available for viewing at our office during normal office hours."

The licensee told the Board that the reason for not distributing complete copies of forest development plans is an economic one, as it costs approximately $2,000 to prepare a complete copy of the plan. Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the description provided by the letter and the actual attachment was understandably confusing to the complainant and his wife. The overview map contained no reference to other forest development plan maps, and there was no indication of what the remainder of the plan comprised.

The complainant asserted that the forest development plan map that was sent to him was difficult to comprehend and failed to include important information such as stream classifications.

Preparing a forest development plan map is a major undertaking. The Code requires the inclusion of a great deal of information, and presenting the information in a clear manner is challenging. Yet, it is essential to ensure that members of the public, who may have little familiarity with forest development planning, can understand the map relatively easily. Clear maps are vital to ensure an adequate opportunity for review and comment. This is especially true of the overview map, which is the primary focus of public attention and the entry point to the remainder of the plan. The 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan comprised several volumes of materials and large-scale maps in addition to the overview map. While the availability of licensee staff to be on hand to answer questions can greatly facilitate the public's understanding of plans, every effort should be made to ensure that maps are easily understood by average citizens. In addition to saving time for all concerned, clear maps help to create a spirit of trust and cooperation and to ensure that the public can make informed comments.

Generally, the overview map that was sent to the complainant was well presented. Distinctly different colours were used to indicate: approved and proposed blocks for each year of the plan, recently harvested blocks, greened up blocks[6], small business blocks[7], and adjacent licensee blocks. Green cross-hatching indicated wildlife corridors. For the most part, the map adheres to the comprehensive guidelines contained in the *Forest Development Plan Guidebook*. (While these are not legislative requirements, they are intended to describe standards that are consistent with Code requirements.) In a few respects, however, there is room for confusion in the map presentation:

- Existing roads on the map are shown in pink and are easily confused in some cases with block boundaries of the same colour.

- Large blocks (several contiguous small blocks) are marked with diagonal lines with the same shade of red as existing roads and Year 2 blocks. While this information is helpful, no explanation is provided in the legend and it is difficult to deduce the meaning of the diagonal lines without explanation.

- Some items that appear on the legend do not appear on the map, and vice versa. Some leave areas are marked with blue horizontal lines and others with diagonal brown lines, and there is no reference to leave areas in the legend. The legend indicates that proposed lakeshore reserves are shown by green diagonal lines. The map indicates that cutblocks extend to the lake and shows no reserves. The licensee explained that this was because digital mapping did not enable the reserves to be shown on such a small-scale map, and it acknowledged that this caused some public confusion.

---

[6] Green-up is the state of a new stand of trees in previously-logged areas where the height and density of the new forest provides a level of hydrological, visual and wildlife habitat recovery that allows adjacent areas to be proposed for logging. Specific green-up requirements are provided in the *Operational Planning Regulation*.

[7] Blocks harvested by licensees under the Ministry of Forests' Small Business Forest Enterprise Program.

- While wetland classifications are shown, no stream classifications are included on the map. The licensee explained that the number of streams that appear on a forest development plan map makes it impossible to show the classification for each. Instead, stream classifications were shown on large-scale 1:20 000 maps in a binder that forms an appendix to the plan.

- Topographical features are not shown on the map that was provided to the Board. The licensee believes they may have been shown on the map provided to the public.

- A broken line marked "C6" extends across the southern portion of the map without explanation of its meaning and with no beginning or end. The licensee explained that the line was intended to delineate the boundary between Forest Licence A40876 and the operating area of Consortium 6 (three Fort St. James companies) and that, because of an oversight, the line had not been completed on the map.

While these examples were individually minor, they contributed to the complainant's difficulty in comprehending the information on the map.

The amount of information that the Code requires to be mapped in a forest development plan cannot be effectively included on a small-scale overview map. In addition to the overview map, the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan included a forest cover overlay and several large-scale maps contained as appendices in separate binders. The overview map was not cross-indexed for cross-reference to the large-scale planning maps. Doing so (as recommended by the *Forest Development Plan Guidebook*) makes it easier for members of the public to locate and understand the various components of a plan. Cross-indexing would have enabled the complainant to understand where to find information not included on the overview map.

The licensee acknowledged that some aspects of the overview map were difficult to comprehend and noted that it has taken steps to improve the clarity of subsequent forest development plan maps.

Finding #3

The overview map for the forest development plan generally followed the guidelines suggested by the *Forest Development Plan Guidebook*. However, some information was presented in a confusing or inconsistent manner.

Licensee Response to Comments on the Forest Development Plan

The complainant asserted that the licensee did not respond to or take seriously comments submitted by the complainant and his wife on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan. After receiving the plan map on July 29, 1998, the complainant's wife wrote back on August 3 asking for discussions on visual impact of seven cutblocks, and commenting that the licensee was responsible for fish habitat destruction through clearcutting in riparian zones. As noted, the licensee responded by offering to set up a meeting in Fort St. James to discuss the concerns of the complainant and his wife about visual impacts.

The Code does not require that licensees respond directly to members of the public who comment on forest development plans, or that licensees change plans in response to public comments. Section 4(1)[8] of the *Operational Planning Regulation* provides that "A person required to publish a notice under section 2 must review all comments received during the period for public comment set out in the notice, and make any revisions to the proposed plan or amendment that the person considers appropriate." The licensee notified the district manager that the complainant's wife had objected to seven blocks that had previously been approved, and attached a copy of her letter with the plan submission.

The licensee complied with Code requirements to review public comments on the forest development plan, but the complainant and his wife had made no detailed comments. This was, in part, because they had not been notified of the opportunity for public review and comment when it was first made available. On the other hand, once they did become aware of the opportunity, the complainant chose not to travel to Fort St. James to review the plan. Had he done so, he might have had an opportunity to comment on the plan in a more detailed manner.

Finding #4

The licensee complied with Code requirements by reviewing comments on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan and forwarding them to the district manager.

Although the complainant would have preferred presentation of the plan at his lodge, the licensee provided an adequate opportunity for review of the forest development plan at its offices in Fort St. James. While the forest development plan map contained some information that was confusing to the complainant, the licensee had offered assistance in its interpretation. Finally, the licensee met the requirements of the Code by reviewing comments provided by the complainant and his wife during the prescribed public review and comment period.

Finding #5

The licensee provided an adequate opportunity for review and comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan.

Section 4(4) of the *Operational Planning Regulation* provides that the opportunity for public review and comment will only be adequate if the district manager is satisfied that the opportunity for review and comment is commensurate with the nature and extent of a person's interest and any right that person may have to use the area under the plan. There was no documentation at the district office to indicate that the district manager had made such a determination. Determinations made under the Code should be documented with reasons based on relevant and objective criteria. While it would be unreasonable to require a district manager to determine the adequacy of the opportunity for every member of the public, in this case the district manager was aware of the complainant's significant interest, as evidenced by

---

[8] Later replaced by section 30.

the fact that he had asked the licensee whether it had sent the plan to the complainant. In the absence of documentation, the fact that the district manager approved the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan was implicit evidence that he was satisfied that the opportunity was satisfactory.

Finding #6

The district manager's approval of the forest development plan indicated that he was satisfied with the opportunity for public review and comment.

Opportunity to Review and Comment on Major Amendment #18

On November 17, 1999, after the original complaint to the Board was received, the licensee submitted, for district manager approval, a major amendment to the forest development plan to address bark beetle infestations. The complainant asserted that the licensee should have notified him of the opportunity to review and comment on the amendment.

Notices advertising that Major Amendment #18 was available for review and comment until December 1 were placed in the Fort St. James *Caledonia Courier* on November 17 and in the *Prince George Citizen* on November 19. On November 26, the licensee wrote to the district manager that "the advertising period was 10 working days as these blocks were previously approved and a large amount of road needs to be built in rough terrain prior to deep snowfalls." On December 13, the licensee notified the district manager that it had received no public comment on the amendment and requested approval.

On December 24, the district manager approved Major Amendment #18. In the rationale for approving the amendment, she noted that she was aware of the interests of Takla Rainbow Lodge in regards to scenic values in the viewshed of Takla Lake, and that Cutting Permit 279 is not visible from the lake. Therefore she was satisfied that scenic resources were not a consideration for the amendment.

On January 7, 2000, the district manager e-mailed the approval rationale to the complainant "as a courtesy." She noted that she was aware of the interests of Takla Rainbow Lodge in regards to scenic values in the viewshed of Takla Lake, and that the block that was the subject of the amendment was not visible from the lake. The complainant said this was the first knowledge he had of the amendment.

In advertising a 10-day period for public review and comment on the amendment, the licensee met the requirements set by sections 25 and 27(4) of the *Operational Planning Regulation.* However, as noted above, the complainant has no access to newspapers except on occasional trips to Fort St. James and, therefore, is unlikely to learn of the opportunity to review amendments with a short public review and comment period.

Although the area covered by the amendment is not visible from the lake, the complainant has historically shown a strong interest in cutblocks in watersheds draining into the lake, and he believes that his business stands to be affected by any potential impact on fisheries. The complainant had twice notified the licensee in writing that all blocks in watersheds draining

into Takla Lake were of vital importance to him because of his concern about potential impacts on water quality and quantity. He had also made clear his interest in all blocks related to beetle management.

In November 1999, the district manager initiated a meeting with the licensee and the complainant to develop a memorandum of understanding for improved communications between the licensee and complainant. One of the results of the meeting was a definition of the current areas of interest of importance to the complainant. While these included visual impacts, they did not specifically mention all watersheds draining into the lake. The complainant later described this as an oversight on his part. However, the licensee and the district manager relied on this statement of areas of interest and, based on this agreement, it was reasonable for the licensee not to notify the complainant of Major Amendment #18, which affected cutblocks that the district manager determined would not be visible from Takla Lake.

The district manager has since requested that the licensee send to the complainant copies of all future advertised amendments falling within his areas of interest, and ensure he receives a copy at the start of the review and comment period. In view of the complainant's concerns about the current understanding of the scope of his areas of interest by the licensee and district manager, these areas of interest may need to be restated.

Finding #7

Based on the complainant's stated areas of interest, the licensee acted reasonably in not notifying the complainant directly about the opportunity for review and comment on Major Amendment #18.

Efforts Towards Improved Communications

This report has focused narrowly on the public review and comment period for the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan and subsequent amendment because Code requirements apply only to that period. The complainant was concerned more generally about his relationship with the licensee and the Ministry of Forests district office over the past several years. He felt that licensee and district staff:

- too often ignored his questions or failed to provide specific answers;
- were unable to identify sources of information they stated as fact, yet called on him to provide scientific proof for his own beliefs;
- declined to take advantage of his local knowledge, yet they stated that they lacked resources to research important information that local knowledge could help verify;
- treated public input as a public relations exercise rather than a means of improving operational planning; and
- often adopted a sarcastic or dismissive tone in dealing with his comments.

For their part, the licensee and district staff told the Board that the complainant:

- wrote such frequent letters covering such a broad range of issues that it required considerable staff time to address them in any detail; and

- frequently used an abusive tone and intemperate language.

The complainant explained that he sometimes boiled over with frustration when he felt his concerns were ignored or addressed in a superficial manner.

It is important that these very different perspectives be addressed and resolved so that the licensee, in preparing its plans, can benefit from the complainant's considerable local knowledge and can address his concerns effectively. The Code makes no requirement that licensees must respond to public comments outside of the designated 60-day period and, accordingly, this investigation did not examine the licensee's responses to the complainant's comments and concerns at other times.

Although Code requirements for public review and comment are limited to narrow time periods, good planning dictates that licensees and ministry staff should be attentive and responsive to public concerns throughout the entire planning period. Members of the public frequently challenge the credibility of planning information. It is not sufficient for planners to respond that the information has been prepared by experts and is, therefore, reliable. Nor should the views of members of the public be dismissed as lacking expertise; local knowledge provides a level of expertise that may well be missing at the planning level, especially when planning resources are limited.

Responding to public concerns on an ongoing basis is important to ensure that negative aesthetic and economic impacts of forest practices are kept to a minimum. The investment of time taken to thoroughly address public concerns can pay off by avoiding simmering frustration and ongoing criticism that, in the long run, may be far more time-consuming to deal with. While this investment may place a burden on limited licensee and government staff resources, it is important to keep in mind that private citizens who provide comprehensive critiques of operational plans often devote considerable amounts of their own time to these activities, without compensation and, often, to public benefit. For that reason, it is essential that licensees and district staff respond to public comments and questions in as focused and timely a manner as resources allow.

Members of the public who take the time to review and comment on operational plans have a responsibility too. First, because both licensee and ministry resources are typically stretched, those who provide comments need to ensure that they express their concerns in a focused, succinct, well-reasoned and timely manner that enables their issues to be easily understood. Second, they need to maintain a respectful level of communication-both as a matter of courtesy and, in their own interest, to invite a respectful and effective response.

It was unfortunate that a deteriorating relationship between the complainant and the licensee over several years contributed to consistently tense communications. As a resident of the area for many years, the complainant has considerable local knowledge about Takla Lake to contribute to the planning process, and it is important that the licensee and district staff take

advantage of this knowledge. It is equally important that, for this to occur, the complainant ensure his communications are both focused and respectful.

In the fall of 1999 the new district manager, aware of the long-standing communication difficulties between the complainant and the licensee, made a point of encouraging a better relationship. To that end, she facilitated a meeting that resulted in the signing of a protocol based on the principles of open and respectful communication, with regular meetings to discuss plans and issues. In addition, the district manager has requested the licensee to ensure that the complainant receives copies of forest development plans and amendments at the start of the public review and comment period. The licensee has indicated an intention to meet with the complainant at his lodge to discuss forest development plans. The licensee also has taken the initiative to begin holding open houses in remote parts of the plan area, including Takla Lake, during preparation of forest development plans before the public review and comment period. Both the complainant and licensee have acknowledged the importance of communicating in a respectful manner. Hopefully these developments will contribute to more productive communications between the complaint, the licensee and district staff in the future, provided that all parties maintain their commitment to improved communications.

Conclusions

1. The licensee complied with all Code requirements regarding opportunities for public review and comment on the 1998-2003 Forest Development Plan and subsequent Major Amendment #18 for Forest Licence A40873. However, because of the complainant's remote location and direct business interest, the licensee should have notified the complainant directly about the opportunity for review and comment on the forest development plan and Amendment #18.

2. Poor communications between the complainant and licensee have impeded an effective flow of information about operational plans and the complainant's concerns about impacts of proposed and current operations. The new district manager in Fort St. James has made an effort to facilitate better communications, recognizing its importance in effective planning. A continuing commitment by all parties will be necessary to maintain good communications.

Recommendations

Section 25 of the *Operational Planning Regulation* states:

> "Before a person submits a forest development plan or amendment for approval, or a district manager puts into effect a forest development plan or amendment, the person or the district manager, as the case may be, must publish a notice, in a form acceptable to the district manager, in a newspaper stating that the forest development plan is available for public review and comment."

Although newspaper notices are generally an effective means of informing the public about opportunities for public review and comment, this investigation illustrates that they are not always available to people in remote locations. Radio ads may provide some assurance of reaching a broader audience, although success in doing so depends on listeners and viewers being tuned in to local stations at a specific time.

The number of people who have access to and rely on the Internet for information is increasing rapidly. The advantage of this form of communication is that posted information is more conveniently accessible to interested members of the public who can search relevant websites for the information they seek. As the Ministry of Forests and major licensees develop increasingly sophisticated websites, notification of opportunities for public review and comment would be a useful addition to the information provided on those sites.

Whatever form advertising takes, there is no guarantee that it will reach all stakeholders with a significant interest in forest development planning. Direct notification by mail, email or fax is an effective form of communication and one that does not entail a significant expense.

With respect to forest development planning processes generally, the Board recommends that persons submitting forest development plans for approval:

- consider placing radio advertisements providing notification of the availability of forest development plans for public review and comment in areas where newspaper access is limited; and

- advertise public review and comment opportunities on their websites if they have them.

The Board recommends that the Ministry of Forests consider making arrangements with licensees to post notifications of opportunities for public review and comment on the ministry website as well as the licensee's website.

Location of the Takla Lake Complaint